THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) and (b) The First Meeting of the Experts Group of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand—Economic Cooperation [BIMST-EC] on Transport and Communications was held on April 23-24, 2001 in New Delhi. Experts from the five member countries of BIMST-EC participated in the meeting.

(c) At the meeting it was decided that the BIMST-EC countries should cooperate in the following areas : transport and cross border facilitation; multimodal transport and logistics; maritime transport including inland water transport; infrastructure development; communication linkages and networking; human resource development in the field of transport and communication.

"Indo-Russian Friendship"

4181. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item, entitled "Indo-Russian friendship disappearing : Report" that appeared in the News Time dated the 2nd August, 2001;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to address the problems adversely affecting our traditional friendship with Russia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Contrary to some views expressed in the news-item, Indo-Russian relations are time-tested, and based on continuity, trust and mutual understanding. The importance attached to these relations is not subject to political vicissitudes. There is a national consensus in both the countries on the need for a strong and stable relationship between India and the Russian Federation. The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation signed in October, 2000 during the visit of President Putin to India has raised the relations between the two countries to a qualitatively higher level.

(c) Cooperation between India and the Russian Federation is multi-faceted and all encompassing. The Prime Minister of India is expected to pay an official

visit to the Russian Federation in November, 2001. Two Sessions of the Indo-Russian Joint Working Group on Afghanistan have already been held. The 7th Session of the Indo-Russian Inter Governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation was held in Moscow on January 15, 2001, and is expected to help in the further intensification of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. An Agreement between ONGC- Videsh Limited of India and M/s Rosneft of the Russian Federation relating to ONGC-VL's participation in the Sakhalin-I oilfields has been signed. A number of Ministerial exchanges covering various sectors have taken place and several others are planned in the coming months. Foreign Office Consultations on a wide range of subjects, including strategic stability, take place on a regular basis between the two countries. These exchanges are an effective mechanism for addressing and countering any potential problem which could adversely affect our traditional friendship with the Russian Federation.

Sino-Russian Pact

4182. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item entitled "Concern over Sino-Russian Pact" that appeared in the 'Times of India' dated the 6th August, 2001;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) steps proposed to be taken to protect India's interests in case Russia and China were to carve out a new strategic balance in the international affairs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Government remains vigilant and takes all appropriate measures to safeguard India's interests.

Illegal foreign occupation in Indian Territory

4183. SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA :
SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the Indian territory/land under illegal occupation of Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, respectively;